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FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5710
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0253

C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 002402

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DEPT FOR INL AND AF/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [GH](#)
SUBJECT: UK DRAWS HARD LINE WITH GOG ON NARCOICS

REF: A) ACCRA 2244 B) ACCRA 2273 C) ACCRA 2374 D)
ACCRA 2140

Classified By: CHARGE SUE K. BROWN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 23-24, UK Foreign Office Minister of State Dr. Kim Howells visited Ghana and delivered a stern message on narcotics to President Kufuor, Minister of Interior Kwamena Bartels, and Attorney General Joe Ghartey. According to UK High Commission contacts, Howells told the GOG it must do more to combat the increasing flow of narcotics and urged the GOG to go after drug barons rather than small time couriers. President Kufuor agreed with Howells and said he highly values counternarcotics cooperation with the UK and U.S. Howells also launched a new, joint UK-GOG narcotics awareness campaign aimed at deterring narcotics couriers from traveling to Europe and the U.S. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On November 1, Gary Nicholls, Second Secretary at the British Embassy, briefed poloff on the October 23-24 visit of UK Foreign Office Minister of State Dr. Kim Howells. Howells, who covers counter narcotics in his portfolio, met with President Kufuor, Minister of Interior Kwamena Bartels and Attorney General Joe Ghartey. Nicholls said Howells delivered a stern message to the Ghanaians on narcotics, stressing in each meeting the importance of complete government participation in the battle against narcotics. Howells also emphasized that the GOG must focus more on investigating and arresting drug barons, rather than concentrating on small time couriers, according to Nicholls. Results from Operation Westbridge, which focuses on interdicting narcotics transiting Ghana's main airport, are impressive, Howells said. However the seizures underscore the growing narcotics problem. Nicholls said Kufuor generally agreed with Howells' statements and added that Ghana highly values counter narcotics cooperation from the U.S. and the UK.

13. (C) In a separate meeting with Minister of Interior Kwamena Bartels, Nicholls said Bartels claimed credit for the recent arrest of two Afghan nationals in Accra (refs A and B) and said these arrests demonstrated Ghana's commitment to fighting drug barons. Bartels asked for more equipment, including scanners and/or dogs, and Howells, responded rather testily that equipment is only as good as the operators. If, Howells went on to say, a "criminal" is operating equipment, it is worthless. Howells told Bartels that the GOG must thoroughly vet all counter narcotics personnel. Attorney General Joe Ghartey was upbeat in a separate meeting with Howells, and touted the success of the bail bond law changes in keeping suspects from jumping bail, according to Nicholls. (COMMENT: The bill has been effective. END COMMENT.) Ghartey also said the anti money-laundering bill in Parliament should become law by December and the asset recovery bill, which would allow assets recovered from criminal investigations to be used by security agencies, should pass soon. (NOTE: The

anti money-laundering bill passed on November 2 as reported in ref C. END NOTE.)

¶4. (U) Howells also launched Operation Hibiscus on October 24. This awareness program, in the form of an animated character, draws upon the true experience of a young Ghanaian woman caught carrying drugs to London. The program will air on state television and will be featured in print media. Members of the diplomatic corps, GOG, and hundreds of students attended the roll-out. Minister of Interior Bartels spoke and said "massive quantities of drugs are transiting the country" and the GOG would make "the appropriate efforts" to counter the narcotics flow, including passing the asset recovery bill soon. The National Chief Imam, Sheikh Nuhu Sharabutu, also spoke and declared, through an interpreter, "jihad" on narcotics and urged everyone to join the fight. This project is the first effort to combine religious, governmental and non governmental actors, and a foreign government in a campaign against narcotics.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The UK is increasingly drawing a stronger line with Ghana on narcotics. As reported in ref D, Nicholls publicly criticized Ghana for not doing better in a recent newspaper article and Howells appears to have continued on this strong theme. Nicholls said that in response to the newspaper story, President Kufuor dressed down the Minister of Interior and National Security Advisor in front of all the other Ministers for their failure to effectively battle the narcotics flow.

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